

## The Potential of Natives

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This time of year, as the days grow warmer and the views outside our windows explode with every shade of green, a lot of us hurry back out into our yards with an exciting sense of *potential*. Maybe a hedge at the back to add some privacy. Or a shade tree by the patio for those sunny summer afternoons. If we refresh the beds out front now, they'll look amazing for next year's graduation party. When it comes to our green spaces, we don't just see them as they are today; we recognize them as dynamic, living things and keep an eye to what they *could* be.

If any of this resonates with you, I'd like you to look at your yard with an entirely different view of its potential. I'd like you to see the possibility that, in addition to hosting barbecues and bocci ball, your own little piece of terra firma could help clean the planet, revitalize some of our struggling bird and butterfly populations, and let you spend more time napping in the shade and less time tending to finicky or out-of-control vegetation. I invite you to consider the potential of natives.

"Natives" are the trees and plants and shrubs that naturally grow in our own little corner of the world. I'm not talking about the ones that were already growing on your property when you moved in; I'm talking about the ones that were growing on your property when the *colonists* moved in. Long before our developments and shopping centers and highways were built, over the course of an eon, these plant species have perfectly acclimated themselves to the soil conditions, temperature range and rainfall of Montgomery Township, Pa. They grow easily and comfortably here, so they need less watering and fertilizer. This not only frees up a little more of your time and cash, it helps to keep our creeks and rivers clean. Like any good neighbor, native

trees and shrubs have evolved a stout sense of community, graciously hosting and generously dishing up the *exact* bugs and berries and seeds our neighborhood birds need to feed their chicks. Imported species just don't serve the classic, home-style fare our native trees and shrubs do. Natives are patient with the neighborhood pests, too, ignoring them for the most part, meaning you'll need fewer pesticides to keep a native happy than you would a demanding, exotic species. And they're polite, unlike so many of these imported plants you hear about – I'm talking about the likes of you, bamboo - spreading out all over the place, invading where they weren't invited, choking out their more mild-mannered native neighbors just because they can.

With so much to offer, you might wonder why everyone doesn't add these stalwart stewards of our communities to their yards. Me too! All it takes to bring some of these native species (plant *and* animal) to your outdoor space is the decision to do it - and a little inside info. There are lots of options out there, and you'll want to be sure you're planting a true native as opposed to a similar variety. Talk to the experts at your favorite nursery, or reach out to a local conservation society for guidance on which native plants, shrubs or trees would thrive on your property. Even your local Penn State Extension Office can help. Consider the possibility that with a few simple choices - and with less water, work, and chemical intervention - your yard can be more than beautiful. It has the potential to be a bastion of biodiversity, a retrospective of the plants and trees the early Pennsylvanians saw, your own nuanced and personal take on "green."

For more information on Native plants and trees:

[Why Native Plants? – PA Native Plant Society](#)  
[Pennsylvania Native Plants for the Perennial Garden](#)  
[Audubon's Why Native Plants Matter](#)  
[Extension.psu.edu Hedgerows for the Home Garden](#)